

# D&D Fiction

## Oroon Rising, Part 11

by Ed Greenwood



### Chapter 11: A Guest of the House of Oroon

Jallana lifted an arm she couldn't feel, that no longer streamed blood nor trembled, and stared hard at it.

Yes, she was translucent, and evidently as insubstantial as the phantom folk around their table. Like a wraith, or a ghost...

Everything had a faint bluish hue, like deep moonlight, and she felt no pain at all. Jallana tried to turn from gazing at her own gore, and look around the room she'd fallen into—and found that the mere thought of it made her drift and turn, swirling like a breeze, to float along just above the floor.

Frightened, she whirled around again, wondering if she should venture far from her body... and seeing she'd left no body behind.

Just all her armor and clothing and gear... and all that blood.

She was free of pain, and of the weight of the Voices riding her mind, too! She glided back to her belt, and tried to pluck her dagger free of its sheath. Her fingers closed around it like shadows, slid through it with no sensation at all, and left her—grasping nothing.

She thrust her hand at the floor, and felt nothing. Slid her hand into the stone until she was elbow-deep... nothing. As if there was nothing there at all. Jallana took a deep, shuddering breath she could neither hear nor feel, and slapped herself across the chest.

Her hand felt solid enough, as if the sting could be bruising if she hit herself harder. She aimed a punch at the floor, and hit nothing, even though her hand disappeared into the stones. She drew it back, flexing fingers that were mere bars of shadow. So she was solid to herself, but not to anything else. Was this what had happened to the feasting family? Hmm, hadn't the potion belonged to one of them?

Was this what she'd be like forever?

Wondering what they were up to suddenly had Jallana turned around and flying back along the tunnel before she thought again about leaving all her garments and belongings behind. She remembered them with a brief



shrug as she soared up the shaft, bursting up into the feasting-chamber wild-eyed and ready to fight, wondering if her nails could rake phantom flesh now that she was one, too....

The table was deserted, every seat empty but for bones.

A few rats scuttled away at her sudden appearance, and she saw what they'd left: Tarlastra, lying huddled on the floor, her head mere bone and ashes, gown torn, and fat hands raised into unmoving claws.

Claws that the rats were even now returning to gnaw.

Jallana swooped at them in a fury, but the rodents learned fast. They shrank and flinched the first few times she passed through them, but then bit and chewed unconcernedly, no matter what she did. Over and around them she coiled, raking at them but unable to touch anything, unable to hold anything.

*So this is what it is, to be a ghost.*

*No wonder they go mad.*

There was no sign of Lockilgar, or anything to show which way he'd gone. Helplessly Jallana swooped and prowled about the chamber, cruising along above the flagstones restlessly, staring at the potion-vials thrust through Tarlastra's belt that she couldn't even touch.

On impulse she swooped through one of them, shuddering as she passed through her dead friend, but... she felt nothing. No magic flooded into her. Dead dwarf or enspelled potion or stone floor, it was all as empty air to her.

Where should she go? What should she do?

What could she do?

"Well, well, our warrior-lass returns. Rather barer than last time, too! And destined to be mine, all mine!"

Jallana whirled around in the air. The voice was unfamiliar, but she knew the mocking, so-superior tone.

A chair far down the table held a sandy-haired, silk-shirted young man, even more handsome than the one called Rael. He was regarding her with delight, chin in hand, and managed the ridiculous feat of blowing her a kiss and winking at her, both at once.

And then he launched himself out of his chair like a surging arrow, flying across the chamber with astonishing speed, eyes dancing. "Give us a kiss, now!"

Jallana watched those sleekly-thewed arms spread wide to catch her, silk silently rippling, and suddenly feared his embrace more than anything in all the world. She whirled and fled, darting down and to one side as a wall rushed up to meet her.

He was right behind her, chuckling, his arms outstretched.

She kicked at the air, changing direction wildly, diving away—and his fingertips brushed her ankle.

*Them* she could feel.

Oh, Mocking Gods, indeed! Snarling in sudden fury, she looped, dodged, whirled around—and charged up into his face, clawing and trying to bite.

Solid he looked, not translucent as she was, but her fingers sank into him with all the numbing tingling of a nearby lightning-strike in a storm, and... and he sank into her with sharklike triumph, phantom lips closing on hers.

He was *inside* her, he was smarter and stronger-willed and *darker*, she was drowning in him, losing her very name, snatching at it desperately, clinging, clinging....

She was but a small part of Marrune, one of the youngest and least-regarded of the royal ruling Oroon, a family as old and as proud as... as... places Jallana knew not, but saw them whirling through her head in wild and colorful succession.

*You are mine, Littlefangs.*

And she was, overwhelmed and struggling helplessly, her ghostly limbs moving to his bidding in a ghastly dance, as he made her strike this pose and then that one, smiling at him even when it became a rictus through which she screamed silently and vainly—

Until she was suddenly, blinking in bewilderment, free again.

Dull secondhand pain echoed through her, an aching in her limbs as she tumbled across the chamber.

Dimly she was aware of her captor Marrune, gloatingly triumphant no longer, shaking and writhing in pain somewhere behind her.

When she slowed and turned at last, feeling weak, Jallana saw the air around him was still glowing with the afterimage of the searing force that had struck and sundered his command of her.

That fading glow hung in the air like a floating lance stretching between Marrune and its hurler, an older and taller Oroon who stood in midair, eyes dark with anger beneath flowing white hair.

They said not a word to each other, but merely stared, more fire in their locked gazes than Jallana had ever before seen.

As the silence stretched, Marrune seemed to shrink and tremble, and the newcomer stood brighter and taller.

Abruptly Marrune faded away, leaving only the older Oroon in the chamber with Jallana. He turned to face her, putting a smile on his face, but it departed swiftly when he saw what was happening to her.

She felt heavier, floating lower despite her attempts to drift towards the ceiling, and pains greater and sharper than the ache of the sundering were suddenly stabbing at her, making her convulse.

It was as if the blades that had so savaged her were fading back into her once more, the blood pouring out of her again...

One of her feet touched the floor—touched it, cold and hard and solid. She was turning solid again. And her death-agonies were racing back.

The potion must be wearing off, or Marrune had drained its effects, or something.

She was dying again.

The white-haired Oroon flashed across the room, reaching to pluck at her. His fingers passed through her, trailing their own tinglings, and he winced. “This way,” he urged her. “Swiftly, before all your pain returns to master you. Lean this way, and reach the body of your unfortunate companion. That vial there: take it. Use every effort to lay hand on it, as you turn solid again. You just drink it right away, or perish!”

Wracked in pains that made her shake, her teeth chattering, Jallana could well believe it. Through a trembling red haze her fumbling fingers found the vial, tugged it open, and as she slumped, her strength failing, thrust it into her mouth. It struck the floor, bouncing... but not before most of its contents had flooded into her mouth.

Cool, soothing elixir poured down Jallana’s throat, banishing pain with unbelievable speed. She rolled over onto her side and lay there trembling, feeling the pain ebb deliciously, sighing and shuddering as it all went away.

“The poison you imbibed is melting your innards,” the Oroon said gently from close above her. “You must drink that potion, also.”

She followed his pointing finger to the fourth vial along on poor Tarlastra’s belt. Not bothering to unclip it, she pulled the stopper and drank it all, her limbs growing stronger and steadier.

“And that one. More healing; your hurts were deep, much blood was lost.”

Jallana followed the Oroon’s gentle guidance through several more potions, until she felt better than she could ever remember feeling before.

Solid and whole once more—and suddenly aware again that she lacked both weapons and garments—Jallana stood when he asked her too, gazing up at the kindly old Oroon, who stood on empty air smiling down at her tenderly.

“Better now?”

Jallana nodded, awed to find that she truly was. Her rescuer beamed at her—and then swooped down at her as swiftly as a striking hawk, rushing into her before she could even gasp or stiffen.

Leaving her quivering on tiptoe, unable to even swallow, as a much colder and stronger voice than Marrune had

been said in her mind, loud and cuttingly precise:

*Greetings, slavemeat. Feel honored to serve and host Darrance Oroon.*

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